Beyond the Module: Active Learning in Online Courses

Learning Community Design Document

Program Overview

This document outlines the design and delivery plan for an eight-session virtual Learning Community aimed at higher education faculty. The program's goal is to equip participants with the knowledge and skills to effectively integrate active learning strategies into their online courses. Each session will include a live Zoom meeting and a corresponding asynchronous Canvas module.

Session 1: Active Learning in Online Courses

- **Zoom Session Plan:**
    - **Introduction:**
        - **Slide 1: Welcome to the Learning Community:** Welcome to "Beyond the Module: Active Learning in Online Courses." We'll spend the next eight sessions exploring active learning strategies, powerful pedagogical approaches, and how to apply them to your online courses. Our goal is to empower you to design and facilitate engaging and effective learning experiences.
        - **Slide 2: Defining Active Learning:** At its core, active learning is a pedagogical approach that shifts the focus from passive listening to active student participation. Instead of simply receiving information, students are engaged in activities that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. This is even more important in online environments to combat feelings of isolation.
        - **Slide 3: The Why: Active Learning in Online Courses:** The research is clear: active learning significantly increases student engagement, improves knowledge retention, and boosts academic performance. For online courses, it's a vital tool for building a sense of community, ensuring students are connected, and moving beyond the traditional lecture format.
    - **Research:** A brief overview of key research on the benefits of active learning for student engagement and retention.

    - **Active Learning Activity:** A live poll and digital "snowball fight" where participants use a shared document to brainstorm and react to ideas.
    - **Discussion:** Open dialogue about participants' current views on active learning.
- **Canvas Module Plan:**
    - **Page 1: Introduction:**
        - **Welcome to the Learning Community:** Welcome to "Beyond the Module: Active Learning in Online Courses." We will spend the next eight sessions exploring active learning strategies, powerful pedagogical approaches, and how to apply them to your online courses. Our goal is to empower you to design and facilitate engaging and effective learning experiences. This learning community is a space for you to share your ideas, challenges, and successes with peers.
        - **Defining Active Learning:** At its core, active learning is a pedagogical approach that shifts the focus from passive listening to active student participation. Instead of simply receiving information, students are engaged in activities that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. This is even more important in online environments to combat feelings of isolation and keep students engaged in the content.
        - **The Why: Active Learning in Online Courses:** The research is clear: active learning significantly increases student engagement, improves knowledge retention, and boosts academic performance. For online courses, it is a vital tool for building a sense of community, ensuring students are connected, and moving beyond the traditional lecture format. Active learning can also help you gather meaningful data on student comprehension in real time.
    - **Page 2: Relevant Research:** Links to a few foundational research articles on active learning.
    - **Page 3: Implementation Examples:**
        - **Digital "Think-Pair-Share":** Instead of an in-person activity, you can use a digital tool like a shared Google Doc or a Padlet. Pose a question, have students "think" and jot down their answer, then "pair" by commenting on a peer's response, and "share" by having a few pairs summarize their discussion in a larger group.
        - **Jigsaw Activities:** Divide a complex topic into smaller parts. Assign a different part to small groups of students. Each group becomes an

"expert" on their section and then teaches it to the rest of the class. This can be done in breakout rooms with shared documents for note-taking.
        - **Online Quizzes for Reflection:** Use a low-stakes quiz tool in your learning management system (LMS) to ask questions that require application and reflection, rather than just recall. For example, after reading a case study, ask "Based on the reading, what would be the first step in addressing this problem, and why?"
    - **Page 4: Example Assignment:**
        - **"One-Minute Paper" Teaching Strategy:** This is a simple, low-stakes assignment you can add to a module or at the end of a unit. It encourages students to reflect on the most important concepts.
            - **Instructions to Students:**
                - Please take one minute to answer the following questions. Your response should be a brief reflection, not a detailed essay.
                - What was the most significant or valuable thing you learned from this module?
                - What question remains unanswered or is still confusing to you?
            - **Rationale for Faculty:** This short activity provides you with immediate feedback on what students are comprehending and what they are struggling with, allowing you to adjust your instruction accordingly.
    - **Discussion Question:** "What are your current thoughts on active learning in online courses? What are your fears, challenges, and hopes as you consider incorporating these strategies?"

Session 2: Building Active Learning into Your Online Course

- **Zoom Session Plan:**
    - **Introduction:**
        - **Slide 1: From Idea to Implementation:** Now that we've defined active learning, let's explore how to integrate it into your own courses. This isn't about adding a random activity; it's about intentional and purposeful design. We'll use a powerful framework to help us get started.

        - **Slide 2: The Backward Design Framework:** Backward design is a planning framework that starts with the end in mind. It involves three stages: 1) Identify desired results (learning objectives), 2) Determine acceptable evidence (assessment), and 3) Plan learning experiences and instruction (activities). This process ensures that your active learning strategies are aligned with your course outcomes.
        - **Slide 3: Intentional and Aligned Design:** When you use backward design, every activity—including active learning—serves a clear purpose. You're not just adding a "fun" activity; you're building an engaging experience that helps students achieve the learning objectives. This intentional approach ensures your course is coherent and effective.
    - **Research:** A summary of research on instructional alignment and its impact on learning outcomes.
    - **Active Learning Activity:** Participants work in breakout rooms to identify one module or unit in their own course where they could integrate a new active learning strategy.
    - **Discussion:** A brief report-out from breakout rooms and open Q&A.
- **Canvas Module Plan:**
    - **Page 1: Introduction:**
        - **From Idea to Implementation:** Now that we have defined active learning, let's explore how to integrate it into your own courses. This is not about adding a random activity; it is about intentional and purposeful design. We will use a powerful framework to help us get started. We will explore how to align active learning activities with learning objectives and assessments to create a cohesive course.
        - **The Backward Design Framework:** Backward design is a planning framework that starts with the end in mind. It involves three stages: 1) Identify desired results (learning objectives), 2) Determine acceptable evidence (assessment), and 3) Plan learning experiences and instruction (activities). This process ensures that your active learning strategies are aligned with your course outcomes and that students are prepared to demonstrate their learning.
        - **Intentional and Aligned Design:** When you use backward design, every activity—including active learning—serves a clear purpose. You are not just adding a "fun" activity; you are building an engaging experience that helps students achieve the learning objectives. This intentional approach ensures your course is coherent and effective. It

helps you justify your instructional choices and provides a clear pathway for student success.

- **Page 2: Relevant Research:** Links to resources on backward design and curriculum mapping.
- **Page 3: Implementation Examples:**
  - **Scenario-Based Learning:** Instead of a multiple-choice quiz, present students with a real-world scenario related to the content. For example, in a psychology course, a scenario could involve a patient presenting with certain symptoms, and the active learning would require students to diagnose the patient and justify their reasoning based on course material.
  - **Digital Escape Rooms:** Use tools like Google Forms or Genially to create a series of questions or puzzles that students must solve to "escape." Each question or puzzle can be an active learning task that requires them to apply a key concept from the module.
  - **Collaborative Problem-Solving:** For a math or science course, you can pose a complex problem. Students work together in a shared document to break down the problem, brainstorm solutions, and present their findings. This forces them to engage with the material and justify their thinking.
- **Page 4: Example Assignment:**
  - **Backward Design Planning Worksheet:** Use this worksheet to outline a new active learning activity for one of your course modules.
    - **1. Desired Learning Outcome(s):** (What should students know or be able to do by the end of this activity?)
    - **2. Acceptable Evidence/Assessment:** (How will students demonstrate their learning? Is it a graded assignment, a discussion post, or a collaborative document?)
    - **3. Active Learning Activity Plan:** (Describe the activity in detail. What are the steps? What digital tools will you use? How will students interact with each other and the content?)
    - **4. Rationale:** (Why is this active learning activity a good fit for this objective and assessment?)
- **Discussion Question:** "Where could you begin integrating active learning into your existing courses? Which course or module would be the best place to start?"

Session 3: Instructor Presence and Community in Online Courses

- **Zoom Session Plan:**
    - **Introduction:**
        - **Slide 1: The Role of the Online Instructor:** As online instructors, our role extends beyond simply delivering content. We are facilitators, guides, and community builders. Our presence—or the feeling that we are active and engaged in the course—is one of the most significant factors in student success and retention.
        - **Slide 2: What is Instructor Presence?** Instructor presence is the purposeful design and facilitation of a course to create a feeling of social connection and engagement. This can be as simple as a personalized video announcement, timely and meaningful feedback, or an active role in the discussion forums.
        - **Slide 3: Fostering Community and Connection:** When students feel connected to you and to each other, they are more likely to participate, persevere, and succeed. Instructor presence is the foundation of a vibrant online community, where students feel safe to ask questions, share ideas, and collaborate with their peers.
    - **Research:** A discussion of research on social presence theory and its effect on student motivation and persistence.
    - **Active Learning Activity:** Participants use a collaborative whiteboard to share examples of instructor presence they have seen or used.
    - **Discussion:** Open discussion on the challenges and rewards of building an online community.
- **Canvas Module Plan:**
    - **Page 1: Introduction:**
        - **The Role of the Online Instructor:** As online instructors, our role extends beyond simply delivering content. We are facilitators, guides, and community builders. Our presence—or the feeling that we are active and engaged in the course—is one of the most significant factors in student success and retention. A strong instructor presence can help reduce student anxiety and foster a sense of belonging in the online environment.
        - **What is Instructor Presence?** Instructor presence is the purposeful design and facilitation of a course to create a feeling of social connection and engagement. This can be as simple as a personalized video announcement, timely and meaningful feedback, or an active

role in the discussion forums. It’s about being "seen" and "heard" by your students, showing them that you are there to support their learning journey.

        - **Fostering Community and Connection:** When students feel connected to you and to each other, they are more likely to participate, persevere, and succeed. Instructor presence is the foundation of a vibrant online community, where students feel safe to ask questions, share ideas, and collaborate with their peers. This sense of community can turn a siloed experience into a supportive and engaging one.
    - **Page 2: Relevant Research:** Links to research on social presence and building a sense of community.
    - **Page 3: Implementation Examples:**
        - **Weekly Video Announcements:** Record a short, one-to-two-minute video at the start of each week to recap the previous week, introduce the new module's topics, and highlight upcoming assignments. Use a friendly, conversational tone and record in a space that feels authentic.
        - **Personalized Feedback:** Instead of just a grade, provide a brief voice or video message with your feedback on a student's submission. This humanizes the grading process and allows you to give more nuanced advice.
        - **Proactive Check-Ins:** Use the LMS messaging system to send a personal check-in to students who haven't logged in recently or who may be struggling. A simple "Is everything okay? How can I help?" can make a huge difference.
    - **Page 4: Example Assignment:**
        - **"Welcome Video" Template and Script:** Use this template to create a welcome video for your students, demonstrating a key aspect of instructor presence.
            - **Part 1: The Welcome (15-30 seconds):**
                - "Hi everyone and welcome to [Course Name]!"
                - "My name is [Your Name], and I'll be your instructor for the next [Number] weeks."
                - "I'm so excited to have you in the class and look forward to getting to know you."
            - **Part 2: The Course Overview (30-60 seconds):**

        - "In this course, we'll be exploring [Topic 1], [Topic 2], and [Topic 3]."
        - "Our main goal is to [Course Objective]."
        - "You'll be working on [Key Assignment 1] and [Key Assignment 2] to help you get there."
    - **Part 3: My Promise to You (15-30 seconds):**
        - "My promise to you is to be an active and engaged presence in this course. You can expect to hear from me regularly in announcements and discussion forums."
        - "If you ever have a question, please don't hesitate to reach out."
    - **Part 4: Call to Action (10 seconds):**
        - "I've already posted our first discussion question, so head there now and introduce yourself. I can't wait to learn alongside you!"
- **Discussion Question:** "What value does an instructor's presence bring to an online course? How do you currently (or how could you) establish a sense of presence?"

Session 4: Learner Collaboration in Online Courses

- **Zoom Session Plan:**
    - **Introduction:**
        - **Slide 1: The Power of Peer Learning:** Learning isn't a solitary activity. When students work together, they build new skills, deepen their understanding of concepts, and gain diverse perspectives. Online collaboration tools allow us to harness the power of peer learning, no matter where students are located.
        - **Slide 2: Designing for Effective Collaboration:** Not all group work is created equal. Effective online collaboration requires intentional design. We'll look at strategies for structuring group activities, assigning roles, providing clear expectations, and giving students the tools they need to work together successfully.
        - **Slide 3: Collaboration for All:** Collaboration can be simple or complex. It can range from a quick peer review of a paper to a complex group project with multiple deliverables. The key is to find

collaborative activities that are meaningful and aligned with your learning objectives.

- **Research:** A summary of research on the effectiveness of collaborative learning models in online environments.
- **Active Learning Activity:** A collaborative digital whiteboard activity where groups work together to solve a scenario.
- **Discussion:** A debrief on the collaborative activity and an open forum for questions.

- **Canvas Module Plan:**
  - **Page 1: Introduction:**
    - **The Power of Peer Learning:** Learning is not a solitary activity. When students work together, they build new skills, deepen their understanding of concepts, and gain diverse perspectives. Online collaboration tools allow us to harness the power of peer learning, no matter where students are located. It also prepares students for real-world work environments where teamwork is essential.
    - **Designing for Effective Collaboration:** Not all group work is created equal. Effective online collaboration requires intentional design. We will look at strategies for structuring group activities, assigning roles, providing clear expectations, and giving students the tools they need to work together successfully. Clear instructions and defined roles are key to avoiding common pitfalls.
    - **Collaboration for All:** Collaboration can be simple or complex. It can range from a quick peer review of a paper to a complex group project with multiple deliverables. The key is to find collaborative activities that are meaningful and aligned with your learning objectives. Start small to build student confidence and comfort with the process.
  - **Page 2: Relevant Research:** Links to articles on collaborative learning models.
  - **Page 3: Implementation Examples:**
    - **Collaborative Document Annotation:** Use a tool like Google Docs or a shared LMS page to have students read a scholarly article together. They can highlight key passages and add comments or questions directly in the text. This is a great way to "read" together.
    - **Peer Review on a Shared Draft:** Create a space in your LMS where students can upload a draft of a paper or project. Other students can then provide feedback using a rubric you have provided, giving them an opportunity to apply their knowledge constructively.

        - **Digital Poster Sessions:** Instead of a traditional presentation, have groups of students create a digital poster using a tool like Padlet or Canva. They can then share their posters in a discussion forum and leave comments on each other's work.
    - **Page 4: Example Assignment:**
        - **Peer Review Rubric Template:** Use this simple template to guide students in providing meaningful feedback on a peer's work.
            - **Reviewer Name:**
            - **Author Name:**
            - **Criteria 1: Clarity of Argument (1-5 Scale)**
                - *Comments:*
            - **Criteria 2: Use of Evidence (1-5 Scale)**
                - *Comments:*
            - **Criteria 3: Organization and Structure (1-5 Scale)**
                - *Comments:*
            - **Two things the author did well:**
            - **One suggestion for improvement:**
    - **Discussion Question:** "What topics or learning objectives from your courses could learners collaborate on? How might this improve their understanding?"

Session 5: Using the TPACK Model to Choose Digital Tools

- **Zoom Session Plan:**
    - **Introduction:**
        - **Slide 1: The Challenge of Technology:** The number of digital tools for teaching and learning can be overwhelming. How do you choose the right one? How do you ensure you're not just using technology for the sake of it? This session will provide a valuable framework for making smart, pedagogically-sound decisions about technology.
        - **Slide 2: Introducing the TPACK Model:** The Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) model helps us think about the relationships between our content, our teaching methods, and the technology we use. It emphasizes that effective technology integration happens at the intersection of all three.
        - **Slide 3: A Guide to Purposeful Integration:** TPACK moves us beyond a tool-first approach. By starting with the content and the pedagogy, we can select digital tools that genuinely enhance learning rather

than just serving as a gimmick. This model guides us to use technology in a way that is both effective and meaningful for our students.

    - **Research:** A summary of the TPACK framework's development and application in instructional design.
    - **Active Learning Activity:** Participants analyze a lesson plan using the TPACK model in small breakout groups.
    - **Discussion:** A share-out of the group analyses and a conversation about selecting the right tool for the job.
- **Canvas Module Plan:**
    - **Page 1: Introduction:**
        - **The Challenge of Technology:** The number of digital tools for teaching and learning can be overwhelming. How do you choose the right one? How do you ensure you are not just using technology for the sake of it? This session will provide a valuable framework for making smart, pedagogically-sound decisions about technology. It will help you move from a tool-focused mindset to a learner-focused mindset.
        - **Introducing the TPACK Model:** The Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) model helps us think about the relationships between our content, our teaching methods, and the technology we use. It emphasizes that effective technology integration happens at the intersection of all three. The model consists of three core components: Content Knowledge (CK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Technological Knowledge (TK).
        - **A Guide to Purposeful Integration:** TPACK moves us beyond a tool-first approach. By starting with the content and the pedagogy, we can select digital tools that genuinely enhance learning rather than just serving as a gimmick. This model guides us to use technology in a way that is both effective and meaningful for our students. It provides a lens for evaluating whether a technology is truly a good fit for a given lesson.
    - **Page 2: Relevant Research:** Links to TPACK framework resources and diagrams.
    - **Page 3: Implementation Examples:**
        - **TPACK in a History Course:**
            - **Content:** Understanding the causes and effects of a historical event (e.g., the Great Depression).

        - **Pedagogy:** A collaborative, inquiry-based learning activity.
        - **Technology:** A digital timeline tool like Tiki-Toki or TimeToast.
        - **TPACK Integration:** Students work in groups to research different factors contributing to the Great Depression. They use the digital timeline tool to collaboratively build a visual representation of the causes and effects, adding multimedia and annotations to showcase their understanding. This requires them to synthesize complex information (CK), work together (PK), and use a new tool (TK).
    - **TPACK in a Biology Course:**
        - **Content:** Learning the process of photosynthesis.
        - **Pedagogy:** A guided inquiry and concept mapping activity.
        - **Technology:** A digital whiteboard tool like Miro or a concept map tool like Coggle.
        - **TPACK Integration:** After a brief introduction, students use the digital whiteboard to collaboratively build a concept map of the photosynthesis process. They can add images, videos, and text to explain the steps, and the instructor can provide real-time feedback. This makes an abstract topic more concrete and interactive.
- **Page 4: Example Assignment:**
    - **TPACK Analysis Worksheet:** Use this worksheet to apply the TPACK model to a lesson you are currently teaching.
        - **Lesson Title/Topic:**
        - **Content Knowledge (CK):** What content must students understand to succeed in this lesson?
        - **Pedagogical Knowledge (PK):** What teaching strategies are you using to deliver this content and engage students? (e.g., lecture, discussion, group work, case study)
        - **Technological Knowledge (TK):** What digital tool(s) are you considering for this lesson?
        - **TPACK Integration:** How do the three components—your content, your teaching strategy, and the technology—work together to enhance student learning? How does the technology enable new pedagogical approaches or content exploration that would not otherwise be possible?

    - **Discussion Question:** "Following the TPACK model, what is one digital tool you could integrate into an existing lesson? Describe how it fits the content, pedagogy, and technology of your lesson."

Session 6: Open Educational Resources (OERs) that Promote Active Learning

- **Zoom Session Plan:**
    - **Introduction:**
        - **Slide 1: What are Open Educational Resources?** Open Educational Resources (OERs) are free, openly licensed teaching, learning, and research materials. They can be full courses, modules, textbooks, videos, or any other resource. Because they are open, they can be freely used, adapted, and shared.
        - **Slide 2: OERs as Active Learning Tools:** OERs are a powerful tool for active learning because they give you the flexibility to adapt content to your specific course needs. Instead of a static textbook, you can use OERs to create interactive assignments, digital labs, or collaborative projects that encourage students to create their own knowledge.
        - **Slide 3: Flexibility, Affordability, and Equity:** The use of OERs can dramatically reduce the cost of course materials for students. Beyond the financial benefit, OERs also promote equity and accessibility by ensuring every student has access to the course content on day one.
    - **Research:** An overview of research on the benefits of OERs, including cost savings and pedagogical flexibility.
    - **Active Learning Activity:** A digital scavenger hunt where participants use OER repositories to find resources for their own courses.
    - **Discussion:** A discussion about the accessibility and adaptability of OERs.
- **Canvas Module Plan:**
    - **Page 1: Introduction:**
        - **What are Open Educational Resources?** Open Educational Resources (OERs) are free, openly licensed teaching, learning, and research materials. They can be full courses, modules, textbooks, videos, or any other resource. Because they are open, they can be freely used, adapted, and shared. OERs are a global movement aimed at providing free access to high-quality educational materials for everyone.

        - **OERs as Active Learning Tools:** OERs are a powerful tool for active learning because they give you the flexibility to adapt content to your specific course needs. Instead of a static textbook, you can use OERs to create interactive assignments, digital labs, or collaborative projects that encourage students to create their own knowledge. The open license allows you to remix and adapt content to make it more relevant and engaging for your students.
        - **Flexibility, Affordability, and Equity:** The use of OERs can dramatically reduce the cost of course materials for students. Beyond the financial benefit, OERs also promote equity and accessibility by ensuring every student has access to the course content on day one. They are a powerful way to make education more accessible to all learners.
    - **Page 2: Relevant Research:** Links to OER repositories and research on their impact.
    - **Page 3: Implementation Examples:**
        - **Curating an OER Textbook:** Instead of requiring an expensive textbook, you can curate a collection of free, open articles and videos from sources like the Open Textbook Library or LibreTexts. You can then use them to create custom modules that directly support your learning objectives.
        - **Student-Created OER:** Assign students a project where they create an OER to explain a difficult concept. For example, in a communications course, students could create a short video tutorial on how to give a good presentation and then license it for others to use. This not only deepens their understanding but also contributes to the wider academic community.
        - **Adapting an OER Lab:** Find an open-source lab manual from a repository like the OER Commons. You can then modify it to fit your specific course needs, adding your own questions, datasets, or video instructions to make it a more active and engaging experience.
    - **Page 4: Example Assignment:**
        - **OER Adaptation Activity:** Use this template to guide students through the process of finding and adapting an OER.
            - **Part 1: Find an OER:** Use one of the provided OER repositories to find an OER related to a topic in your course.
            - **Part 2: Analyze the OER:**

        - What is the OER? (e.g., an article, a video, a textbook chapter)
        - What is its open license?
        - What is its target audience?
    - **Part 3: Adapt the OER:** How would you adapt or remix this OER to create an active learning activity for a course? Describe the steps you would take and what the students would do. Be specific.
  - **Discussion Question:** "Share an example of an open educational resource (OER) you've used or found today. How does it promote active learning in your course?"

Session 7: Accessibility in Online Course Design and Delivery

- **Zoom Session Plan:**
  - **Introduction:**
    - **Slide 1: Why Accessibility Matters:** In online education, accessibility is not just a compliance issue; it's a matter of equity and good teaching. By designing our courses with accessibility in mind, we ensure that every student, regardless of ability, can access the content and engage in the learning process.
    - **Slide 2: Universal Design for Learning:** Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that helps us proactively design courses to meet the diverse needs of all learners. It is based on three principles: providing multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement.
    - **Slide 3: Proactive Design, Not Retroactive Fixes:** Designing for accessibility from the start is much more effective than trying to fix things later. We'll look at some simple but impactful strategies you can apply today, such as using heading styles, providing image alt-text, and ensuring your course materials are screen-reader-friendly.
  - **Research:** A summary of research on the importance of designing for all learners.
  - **Active Learning Activity:** Participants use an online tool to conduct a quick accessibility check on a provided document.
  - **Discussion:** A dialogue on common accessibility challenges and initial strategies for overcoming them.
- **Canvas Module Plan:**

- **Page 1: Introduction:**
  - **Why Accessibility Matters:** In online education, accessibility is not just a compliance issue; it is a matter of equity and good teaching. By designing our courses with accessibility in mind, we ensure that every student, regardless of ability, can access the content and engage in the learning process. It also helps improve the user experience for *all* students.
  - **Universal Design for Learning:** Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that helps us proactively design courses to meet the diverse needs of all learners. It is based on three principles: providing multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement. UDL helps to remove barriers to learning and provides multiple pathways for students to demonstrate their knowledge.
  - **Proactive Design, Not Retroactive Fixes:** Designing for accessibility from the start is much more effective than trying to fix things later. We will look at some simple but impactful strategies you can apply today, such as using heading styles, providing image alt-text, and ensuring your course materials are screen-reader-friendly. This approach saves time and effort in the long run.
- **Page 2: Relevant Research:** Links to UDL guidelines and accessibility standards.
- **Page 3: Implementation Examples:**
  - **Headings and Lists:** Use proper heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) in your Word documents, Canvas pages, and online materials. This helps screen readers and other assistive technologies navigate your content. Use bulleted or numbered lists for key information instead of a long block of text.
  - **Alt-Text for Images:** Whenever you insert an image, provide a brief, descriptive alternative text (alt-text) that explains the image's purpose. For example, an image of a diagram of the solar system would have alt-text that reads, "Diagram of the solar system showing the planets in order from the sun."

Image of the solar system

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* **Accessible Documents:** When sharing documents, ensure they are
accessible. This means creating accessible PDFs, providing transcripts
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for videos, and using a clear, easy-to-read font.
* **Closed Captions for Videos:** Always ensure that any videos you
use have accurate closed captions. This is not only a requirement for
students with hearing impairments but also helpful for all students,
especially those who are not native speakers or who are in a noisy
environment.
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- **Page 4: Example Assignment:**
    - **Accessibility Review Checklist:** Use this simple checklist to review a document, presentation, or Canvas page from your course.
        - **Headings:** Are headings used in a logical order (e.g., Heading 1, then Heading 2)?
        - **Alternative Text:** Does every image or non-text element have descriptive alt-text?
        - **Hyperlinks:** Are hyperlinks descriptive? (e.g., "History Department Website" instead of "Click here")
        - **Color Contrast:** Is there sufficient contrast between the text color and the background color?
        - **Tables:** Are tables simple and used for data, not for layout?
- **Discussion Question:** "What is one challenge to accessibility in online course design or delivery you've faced or anticipate? How might you begin to address it?"

Session 8: Reaching Today's Online Students

- **Zoom Session Plan:**
    - **Introduction:**
        - **Slide 1: A Portrait of the Modern Online Student:** Today's online student is diverse, motivated, and often juggles multiple responsibilities. They are looking for flexible, relevant, and engaging learning experiences that help them achieve their personal and professional goals.
        - **Slide 2: What Motivates Our Students?** Beyond the credential, today's students are often motivated by career advancement, skill-building, and a desire to make a difference. Understanding these intrinsic motivations can help us design courses that are more connected to their real-world needs and aspirations.

        - **Slide 3: Designing for Today's Learners:** This final session brings everything together. By applying the active learning strategies, intentional design principles, and accessibility best practices we've discussed, we can create online courses that not only meet the needs of today's students but also truly inspire them to learn.
    - **Research:** A summary of research on online student characteristics and learning behaviors.
    - **Active Learning Activity:** A live poll and word cloud where participants share their observations about their own students.
    - **Discussion:** A culminating discussion about how these insights will impact their future course design and delivery.
- **Canvas Module Plan:**
    - **Page 1: Introduction:**
        - **A Portrait of the Modern Online Student:** Today's online student is diverse, motivated, and often juggles multiple responsibilities. They are looking for flexible, relevant, and engaging learning experiences that help them achieve their personal and professional goals. Many are also non-traditional students, returning to school later in life with a wealth of professional experience.
        - **What Motivates Our Students?** Beyond the credential, today's students are often motivated by career advancement, skill-building, and a desire to make a difference. Understanding these intrinsic motivations can help us design courses that are more connected to their real-world needs and aspirations. When you can connect course content to a student's career goals or passions, you create a powerful motivator.
        - **Designing for Today's Learners:** This final session brings everything together. By applying the active learning strategies, intentional design principles, and accessibility best practices we have discussed, we can create online courses that not only meet the needs of today's students but also truly inspire them to learn. This means designing with flexibility and empathy in mind.
    - **Page 2: Relevant Research:** Links to articles and reports on online student demographics and learning theories.
    - **Page 3: Implementation Examples:**
        - **Micro-Learning and "Bite-Sized" Content:** Instead of one long lecture, break your content into short, five-to-ten-minute video

segments. This is easier for students to digest, especially those who are learning on the go or have limited time.

- **Connect Content to Career Goals:** In every module, provide a clear, real-world example of how the concepts being taught are used in a professional setting. Bring in an expert guest speaker (pre-recorded or live) to talk about how they use these skills in their job.
- **"Choose Your Own Adventure" Assessments:** Give students a choice in how they demonstrate their learning. Instead of a standard final paper, for example, allow them to choose between a paper, a digital portfolio, a video presentation, or a podcast.

- **Page 4: Example Assignment:**
  - **Student Persona Template:** Use this template to create a fictional student persona based on the students in your current course or program.
    - **Name/Age:** (Give your persona a name and an age range.)
    - **Motivation:** (Why is this student taking your course? What are their personal or professional goals?)
    - **Challenges:** (What are some challenges this student might face? (e.g., full-time job, family responsibilities, limited internet access))
    - **Strengths:** (What strengths does this student bring to the course? (e.g., professional experience, time management skills, passion for the subject))
    - **How can this course help them?** (How can you design your course to help this student succeed?)
- **Discussion Question:** "Reflecting on this session, what is one new insight you have about today's online students and their motivations? How will this insight impact your course design or teaching approach?"